

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of operating a shared bonus game in a gaming system comprising a controller and a plurality of gaming devices in communication with said controller, said method comprising:

initiating a collective bonus round;

generating a plurality of entries for said shared bonus game;

detecting a bonus game trigger;

executing said shared bonus game;

randomly selecting a winning entry from among said plurality of entries; and

providing a payout for said winning entry.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said initiating a collective bonus round comprises receiving a message indicating that at least one gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices is in collective bonus round mode for play of said shared bonus game.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein said receiving a message indicating that at least one gaming device is in collective bonus round mode comprises receiving said message after polling each of said plurality of gaming devices.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein said receiving a message indicating that at least one gaming device is in collective bonus round mode comprises receiving a request via the Internet to initiate said collective bonus round mode.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said generating a plurality of entries for said shared bonus game comprises:

tracking activity on each of said plurality of gaming devices;

detecting at least one base game played on at least one gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices;

determining whether said at least one base game is a bonus-qualifying base game; and

creating a current entry for each said bonus-qualifying base game authorized to participate in said shared bonus game.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein said tracking activity on each of said plurality of gaming devices comprises receiving tracking information from a player tracking system operably connected to said controller and said plurality of gaming devices, said tracking information comprising:

a name of a player;
current gaming activity; and
past gaming activity.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein said current and past gaming activities include at least one of a number of games played, an amount wagered on each of said games played, credits earned by said player, awards made to said player and a gaming device identification number.

8. The method of claim 5, further comprising providing a payback for said at least one base game according to at least a base game par sheet.

9. The method of claim 5, wherein said bonus-qualifying base game is a base game that satisfies at least one of initiating said base game using at least a minimum price, initiating said base game using a maximum price, generating a qualifying symbol during said base game, generating a qualifying combination of symbols during said base game, generating a qualifying award during said base game and generating a qualifying combination of awards during said base game..

10. The method of claim 5, wherein said creating a current entry for each said bonus-qualifying base game authorized to participate in said shared bonus game comprises:
assigning a unique code to said bonus-qualifying base game;
storing said unique code and corresponding entry information in an entry database within said controller, said corresponding entry information including:
a gaming device identifier;
a player identifier;
a qualifying parameters identifier; and

a time and date identifier;
categorizing said unique code as an authorized unique code; and
storing said authorized unique code in a collective bonus pool.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein said categorizing said unique code as an authorized unique code comprises determining that said unique code was generated on an authorized gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices, said authorized gaming device satisfying at least one of having a player tracking card inserted into said authorized gaming device, having a coupon inserted into said authorized gaming device and having a minimum number of said plurality of entries provided by said authorized gaming device during said collective bonus round.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein said having a minimum number of said plurality of entries provided by said authorized gaming device comprises a combination of generating said current entries during said collective bonus round and introducing into said authorized gaming device past entries generated at a time previous to said collective bonus round.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein said introducing into said authorized gaming device past entries comprises at least one of reading said past entries from said player tracking card, reading said past entries from said coupon and retrieving said past entries from said controller.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein said introducing into said authorized gaming device past entries generated at a time previous to said collective bonus round comprises including said past entries with said plurality of entries to be randomly selected during said collective bonus round.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein said introducing into said authorized gaming device past entries generated at a time previous to said collective bonus round comprises banking said past entries according to a bank par sheet for introduction into a future entry pool.

16. The method of claim 1, wherein said detecting a bonus game trigger comprises detecting at least one of initiating said collective bonus round, lapsing a predetermined period of time, lapsing a random period of time, accumulating a predetermined shared bonus game pay amount in a progressive jackpot, detecting a predetermined number of entries for said shared bonus game and detecting a predetermined number of said plurality of gaming devices having generated at least one entry of said plurality of entries for said shared bonus game.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein said executing said shared bonus game comprises:
providing indicia of said shared bonus game;
initiating said shared bonus game; and
determining an outcome of said shared bonus game.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said providing indicia of said shared bonus game comprises:
locating a primary bonus game indicator proximate at least a substantial number of said plurality of gaming devices, said primary bonus game indicator providing indicia of said shared bonus game to proximate said at least a substantial number of said plurality of gaming devices; and
locating secondary bonus game indicators on each of said plurality of gaming devices, each of said secondary bonus game indicators providing indicia of said shared bonus game at its associated gaming device.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein said providing indicia of said shared bonus game further comprises exhibiting at least one of:
names of substantially each participant in said shared bonus game;
images of substantially each participant in said shared bonus game;
said shared bonus game trigger;
said initiating said shared bonus game;
progress of said shared bonus game;
an outcome of said shared bonus game;
a name of a winning player corresponding to said winning entry; and
an image of said winning player.

20. The method of claim 18, wherein said locating a primary bonus game indicator proximate at least a substantial number of said plurality of gaming devices comprises locating said primary bonus game indicator so as to be audible and visible from said at least a substantial number of said plurality of gaming devices.

21. The method of claim 17, wherein said initiating said shared bonus game comprises: sending a prompt to a player on one gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices to initiate said shared bonus game, said one gaming device having provided said bonus game trigger; receiving an input from said player into said one gaming device; and activating said shared bonus game.

22. The method of claim 17, wherein said determining an outcome of said shared bonus game comprises randomly selecting said payout consistent with a base game par sheet used for base games played on said plurality of gaming devices.

23. The method of claim 17, wherein said determining an outcome of said shared bonus game comprises randomly selecting said payout consistent with a par sheet separate from a base game par sheet used for base games played on said plurality of gaming devices.

24. The method of claim 1, wherein providing a payout for said winning entry comprises identifying one gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices as having submitted said winning entry and electronically transferring said payout to said one gaming device.

25. A method of providing a percentage payback in a gaming system comprising: providing a controller; providing a plurality of gaming devices in communication with said controller, at least one gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices configured to provide a base game having a first payback based on a base game par sheet; placing said at least one gaming device into linked mode; playing at least one bonus-qualifying base game on said at least one gaming device according to

said first payback;
storing a unique identifier for each said bonus-qualifying base game in a collective bonus pool;
sharing a bonus game among at least one qualified participant;
selecting at least one winner of said shared bonus game by randomly selecting at least one said
unique identifier from said collective bonus pool; and
providing a second payback to said at least one selected winner of said shared bonus game.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein said playing at least one bonus-qualifying base game on said at least one gaming device comprises playing said base game according to at least one of initiating said base game using at least a minimum price, initiating said base game using a maximum price, generating a qualifying symbol during said base game, generating a qualifying combination of symbols during said base game, generating a qualifying award during said base game and generating a qualifying combination of awards during said base game.

27. The method of claim 25, wherein said at least one qualified participant satisfies at least one of inserting a player tracking card into one gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices; inserting a coupon into said one gaming device and playing a minimum number of said at least one bonus-qualifying base game.

28. The method of claim 25, wherein said sharing a bonus game among at least one qualified participant comprises providing said bonus game on a primary bonus game indicator, said bonus game having substantially the same rules as said base game.

29. The method of claim 28, further comprising displaying said shared bonus game on display devices located on said plurality of gaming devices.

30. The method of claim 28, wherein said shared bonus game is executed according to different rules than said base game.

31. The method of claim 25, wherein said sharing a bonus game further comprises determining an amount for said second payback substantially consistent with said base game par sheet.

32. The method of claim 25, wherein said sharing a bonus game further comprises determining an amount for said second payback in excess of said base game par sheet.

33. The method of claim 32, further comprising determining an amount for said second payback in excess of said base game par sheet when said first payback has been determined to be an amount less than said base game par sheet, said first payback combined with said second payback being substantially consistent with said base game par sheet.

34. A method of tracking a player's participation in a plurality of bonus games shared among a plurality of players in a gaming system which randomly selects a winning entry registered to a winning player from a current entry pool, said method comprising:
detecting said player's use of a gaming device in communication with said gaming system;
detecting a current bonus round;
detecting current entries generated by said player using said gaming device during said current bonus round;
detecting a triggering event indicating a start of a current bonus game of said plurality of bonus games;
querying if said player is eligible to participate in said current bonus game;
if yes, including said current entries in said current entry pool;
detecting completion of said current bonus game; and
clearing said current entry pool.

35. The method of claim 34, wherein said detecting current entries generated by said player using said gaming device comprises detecting base games played on said gaming device, said base games satisfying at least one of initiating said base games using at least a minimum price, initiating said base games using a maximum price, generating a qualifying symbol during said base games, generating a qualifying combination of symbols during said base games, generating a qualifying award during said base games and generating a qualifying combination of awards during said base games.

36. The method of claim 34, wherein said querying if said player is eligible to participate in said current bonus game comprises querying whether said player satisfies at least one of inserting a player tracking card into said gaming device, inserting a coupon into said gaming device and generating a minimum number of said current entries using said gaming device.

37. The method of claim 34, further comprising:
detecting past entries registered to said player;
if said player is eligible to participate in said current bonus game, distributing said past entries among said current entry pool, a next entry pool and a predefined number of subsequent entry pools according to a first par sheet; and
if said player fails to be eligible to participate in said current bonus game, querying if said player has relinquished control of said gaming device and, if no, designating said current entries as said past entries.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein said first par sheet is a banking par sheet.

39. The method of claim 37, wherein said detecting past entries further comprises detecting entries generated by said player during a previous bonus round that were taken by said player from said gaming system and reintroduced by said player into said gaming system through said gaming device during said current bonus round.

40. The method of claim 37, if said player has relinquished control of said gaming device, further comprising:

querying if said player has taken said current entries and said past entries from said gaming device;

if no, distributing said current entries and said past entries among said next entry pool and said predefined number of subsequent entry pools according to a second par sheet.

41. The method of claim 40, wherein said second par sheet is identical to said first par sheet.

42. The method of claim 40, further comprising registering to a house player said current entries and said past entries not taken by said player such that, if randomly selected as said winning entry, said house player becomes said winning player.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein said house player comprises an administrator of said bonus games in said gaming system.

44. The method of claim 34, wherein said detecting completion of said current bonus game further comprises:
querying whether said player is said winning player for said current bonus game; and
if yes, electronically recording an award transferred to said player.

45. The method of claim 34, further comprising defining a next bonus round as said current bonus round and repeating the method acts as recited in claim 34.

46. A method of providing a percentage payback to a player wagering on an outcome of a plurality of games, said method comprising:
providing a first game to said player;
providing a first portion of said percentage payback to said player for wagering on said first game according to a first par sheet;
providing a second game to said player and at least one other player, said second game having substantially the same rules as said first game and including random selection of a winning player from among said player and said at least one other player; and

providing a second portion of said percentage payback to said player according to a second par sheet.

47. The method of claim 46, wherein said second par sheet is substantially the same as said first par sheet.

48. The method of claim 46, further comprising providing a substantial part of said percentage payback from said second portion as compared to said first portion.

49. A gaming device comprising:
a random number generator configured to select a random combination of symbols during a base game played on said gaming device; and
at least one display electrically coupled to said random number generator, said at least one display configured for:
exhibiting said random combination of symbols during said base game;
in a first mode, exhibiting a bonus game controlled by said gaming device; and
in a second mode, exhibiting a shared bonus game controlled by an external controller in communication with said gaming device and at least one other gaming device, said at least one display indicating at least a randomly selected winner of said shared bonus game.

50. The gaming device of claim 49, wherein said random combination of symbols of said base game are determined by a microprocessor.

51. The gaming device of claim 49, wherein said at least one display comprises:
a first game indicator configured for exhibiting said random combination of symbols during said base game; and
a second game indicator configured for:
exhibiting said bonus game in said first mode; and
exhibiting said shared bonus game in said second mode.

52. The gaming device of claim 51, wherein said first game indicator is a base game indicator and said second game indicator is a bonus game indicator.

53. The gaming device of claim 51, further comprising at least one additional indicator.

54. The gaming device of claim 53, wherein said at least one additional indicator is configured to display an image of a player using said gaming device.

55. The gaming device of claim 53, wherein said at least one additional indicator is configured to exhibit an amount accumulated in a progressive bonus pool.

56. The gaming device of claim 49, wherein said at least one display comprises a gaming device display including at least two distinct segments comprising:
a first segment configured for exhibiting said random combination of symbols during said base game; and
a second segment configured for:
exhibiting said bonus game in said first mode; and
exhibiting said shared bonus game in said second mode.

57. The gaming device of claim 56, wherein said first segment is a base game display segment and said second segment is a bonus game display segment.

58. The gaming device of claim 56, further comprising at least one additional game display segment.

59. The gaming device of claim 58, wherein said at least one additional game display segment is configured to display an image of a player using said gaming device.

60. The gaming device of claim 58, wherein said at least one additional game display segment is configured to exhibit an amount accumulated in a progressive bonus pool.

61. The gaming device of claim 49, further comprising a camera selectively positioned so as to acquire an image of a player using said gaming device.

62. The gaming device of claim 61, further comprising positioning said camera behind a camera window within said gaming device.

63. The gaming device of claim 61, wherein said camera is configured to be controlled by said external controller during said second mode.

64. The gaming device of claim 49, further comprising a memory device configured to electronically store game parameters and par sheets for at least one of said base game, said bonus game and said shared bonus game.

65. The gaming device of claim 49, further comprising at least one communication device configured to communicate with at least one of said external controller, an external player tracking system, the Internet and a wide area network (WAN).

66. The gaming device of claim 49, wherein said gaming device comprises a personal computer.

67. A controller for providing a shared bonus game in a gaming system, said controller comprising:

a memory device;

at least one par sheet stored in said memory device; and

a microprocessor electrically coupled to said memory device, said microprocessor configured for:

executing a shared bonus game for at least one external gaming device electrically connected to said controller; and

selecting at least one winner of said shared bonus game by randomly selecting at least one winning entry from an entry pool.

68. The controller of claim 67, wherein said memory device is configured to electronically store at least one of shared bonus game parameters, a par sheet for said shared bonus game, an entry database and said entry pool.

69. The controller of claim 67, further comprising at least one communication device configured to communicate with at least one of said at least one external gaming device, a primary bonus game indicator, an external player tracking system, the Internet and a wide area network (WAN).

70. The controller of claim 67, wherein said at least one external gaming device comprises a personal computer.

71. The controller of claim 67, wherein executing a shared bonus game comprises using a random number generator configured to select a random combination of indicia to determine an award amount for said shared bonus game.

72. The controller of claim 71, further comprising using said random number generator to randomly select said at least one winning entry.

73. A gaming system comprising:
a controller configured to provide a shared bonus game;
a plurality of gaming devices in communication with said controller, each gaming device configured to generate entries for said shared bonus game; and
a primary bonus game indicator in communication with said controller configured to at least identify a randomly selected winner of said shared bonus game.

74. The gaming system of claim 73, further comprising a player tracking system in communication with said controller and said plurality of gaming devices, said player tracking system configured to provide said controller with player information including a player name, current gaming activity and past gaming activity.

75. The gaming system of claim 74, wherein said current gaming activity comprises at least one activity including a number of base games played during a current bonus round, an amount wagered on each said base game, an award provided for any of said base games and a gaming device identifier for each said base game.

76. The gaming system of claim 74, wherein said past gaming activity comprises at least one activity including a number of base games played during a previous bonus round, an amount wagered on each said base game, an award provided for any of said base games and a gaming device identifier for each said base game.

77. The gaming system of claim 74, wherein said player tracking system is internal to said controller.

78. The gaming system of claim 73, wherein said plurality of gaming devices and said primary bonus game indicator are located mutually substantially proximate each other.

79. The gaming system of claim 78, wherein a substantial number of said plurality of gaming devices are detectable from substantially any one of said plurality of gaming devices.

80. The gaming system of claim 78, wherein said primary bonus game indicator is located so as to provide indicia of said shared bonus game to substantially all participants and observers of said shared bonus game.

81. The gaming system of claim 80, wherein said indicia of said shared bonus game comprises at least one of a name of substantially each participant in said shared bonus game, an image of substantially each participant in said shared bonus game, a triggering event for said shared bonus game, initiation of said shared bonus game, progress of said shared bonus game, an outcome of said shared bonus game and said winner of said shared bonus game.

82. The gaming system of claim 73, further comprising secondary bonus game indicators located on substantially each of said plurality of gaming devices, said secondary bonus game

indicators configured to provide indicia of said shared bonus game to substantially one participant in said shared bonus game.

83. The gaming system of claim 82, wherein said indicia of said shared bonus game comprises at least one of an indication of participation in said shared bonus game by a player operating one gaming device of said plurality of gaming devices, an image of said player, a triggering event for said shared bonus game, initiation of said shared bonus game, progress of said shared bonus game, an outcome of said shared bonus game and said winner of said shared bonus game.

84. The gaming system of claim 73, wherein said controller is configured to provide said shared bonus game with at least one other gaming system, said gaming system and said at least one other gaming system located in mutually substantially remote locations.

85. The gaming system of claim 84, wherein said gaming system is configured to communicate with said at least one other gaming system through a wide area network.

86. The gaming system of claim 84, wherein said gaming system is configured to communicate with said at least one other gaming system through an Internet connection.

87. The gaming system of claim 84, wherein said controller is further configured to provide said shared bonus game with at least one other gaming device, distinct from said plurality of gaming devices, said plurality of gaming devices and said at least one other gaming device located in mutually substantially remote locations.

88. The gaming system of claim 87, wherein said gaming system is configured to communicate with said at least one other gaming device through a wide area network.

89. The gaming system of claim 87, wherein said gaming system is configured to communicate with said at least one other gaming device through an Internet connection.